

## Passports & Immigration Visas — Plan Ahead!

by Mark Christensen

Those of us who watch AFN television might sometimes tune out the public service announcements concerning immigration issues. The spots advise you to plan in advance when you need personal identification or travel documents after a marriage, birth, or expiration of existing documents. During a recent conference hosted by immigration officials at the US Consulate in Frankfurt, the importance of planning ahead was stressed many times.



What kinds of documents might you need? To start, children born outside the US to military or civilian members of the US Forces cannot travel across international borders without a passport. Even an infant child, only a few weeks old, must have a passport. But the passport is not the first step. After your child is born, get the child's birth certificate, either AE Form 40-400B (if born at a US military facility) or *Geburtsurkunde* (if born in a German facility). Take that birth certificate to your passport office (the Army Passport Office is located in Building 3245, Kleber Kaserne) and apply to have the birth of your child recognized by the US, and for a US passport. The Consular Report of Birth Abroad is an acknowledgment by the US Government that your child, born outside the US, is a US citizen. The passport lets your child travel across international boundaries. Obtaining each of these documents takes time. Plan ahead.

What else? If you have non-US citizen family members you might want them to travel to the US with you, or maybe travel to the US to stay there permanently. To do this your family member must have a proper immigration visa or transportation letter. Each of these documents takes time to acquire, and Consulate personnel cannot adjudicate your request before requests filed earlier except in a few exceptional circumstances. Unless you or another family member is gravely ill and there is no one else to provide care, you probably do not have an exceptional situation that will permit your application to cut to the front of the line of existing applications.

Immigration visas normally take four to six months to obtain if all application requirements are met and there are no background investigation issues. The renewal of expired green cards and passports takes several weeks. Obtaining transportation letters to travel to the US with an expired green card requires planning and a visit to the Frankfurt Consulate.

**Bottom line:** If you anticipate changes to your family, by marriage or birth, or notice any identification documents that are about to expire, plan ahead to acquire or renew the documents you will need to stay in Germany, travel outside Germany, or return to the US.

**For more information on passports, visas, and related issues, contact Sean Osborne at the Kleber Passport Office at DSN 483-7662 or Civilian 0631-411-7662.**